2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt

THE VILLAGES AND THEIR INHABITANTS

The villages are intersected by narrow lanes—in most cases they can hardly be dignified by the name of streets—progress along which is often impeded, sometimes almost entirely blocked, by piles of refuse and mud. In some of the larger villages there may be one or two broader streets, forming the chief thoroughfares (Fig. 8). At the side of one of the narrow lanes there may be an open space in which palm-trees grow (Fig. 9), and here the village weaver often arranges the warp for his cloth, the threads being attached to the trunks of two of the trees (Fig. 10). When this process is completed the warp is taken indoors and attached to the

FIG. 8. A VILLAGE STREET

loom, which usually stands in a somewhat dark room, with mud-coloured walls, and so small in size that it is impossible to obtain a satisfactory photograph.

Itinerant vendors ply their trades up and down these tortuous village lanes, uttering their characteristic cries. For example, the onion-seller advertises his wares by calling out, " Oh, onion, sweet as honey ! " The cries are usually intoned in a minor key, sounding to the uninitiated more like a plaintive chant than the proclamation of goods for sale. Another hawker may trade in coloured cotton cloths, printed with various designs to suit all tastes. He usually conveys his goods about on a small hand-cart. From such humble beginnings more than one fortune has been made, for the peasants are fond of hoarding their money, their daily living costing them but little. In time the small sums thus

2: Blackman E-5 (1920-1926) 1927
MR13 Fellahin MR13
Upper Egypt
Ancient Egypt MR5

CHAPTER XVIII

ANCIENT EGYPTIAN ANALOGIES

I WISH to make it quite clear that in this chapter I am by no means supplying a full list of the ancient analogies with which I am acquainted. My intention is merely to give the reader some idea of the importance of this particular branch of my research. In my strictly scientific account of the *fellāḥīn*, to which I have referred in the Preface, the question of survivals will be dealt with very fully.

As I am shortly publishing a book which deals exclusively with Coptic saints and Muslim sheikhs, to be followed later by a book on modern Egyptian medicine-men and their remedies, I am here omitting all references to the numerous and important survivals connected with the cults of those saints and sheikhs, and I am only just touching on the resemblances of the modern to the ancient magico-medical prescriptions.

An ancient Egyptian town and village must have presented much the same appearance as an Upper Egyptian town and village of to-day.[1] Then as now (pp. 27 f.) the better sort of house had one or more upper stories,[2] was doubtless often whitewashed or colour-washed,[3] and had a staircase probably (as is now frequently the case) of brick, leading from floor to floor and on to the roof, where were erected exactly the same mud granaries (p. 28) as are to be seen there nowadays (see Fig. 154).

On the roof of an ancient as of a modern house were often placed two *malāḳif* (singular *malḳaf*),[4] the ventilators by means of which the north and south wind are conveyed into the house during the hot weather.

[1] See A. M. Blackman, *Luxor and its Temples* (London, 1923), p. 4; T. E. Peet and C. L. Woolley, *The City of Akhenaten*, Part I (London, 1923), p. 54 and note 1.

[2] A. Wiedemann, *Das alte Ägypten* (Heidelberg, 1920), p. 168; A. Erman and H. Ranke, *Aegypten und aegyptisches Leben im Altertum* (Tübingen, 1923), pp. 190 ff.; W. Wreszinski, *Atlas zur altaegyptischen Kulturgeschichte* (Leipzig, 1923), Pl. 60a.

[3] Nina de Garis Davies, *The Tombs of Two Officials of Tuthmosis the Fourth* (London, 1923), Pl. XXXIV, p. 30.

[4] A. Erman and H. Ranke, *op. cit.*, pp. 205 f.; A. Wiedemann, *op. cit.*, p. 168; N. de Garis Davies, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

731 and to the whole village. A spark from oven orstove in
[372 the burning heat of summer is enough to bring disaster.
488] Village fires, by their size and frequency, constitute one of the plagues of the Egyptian countryside. Between 1926 and 1930 sixty-six places were destroyed in this way, and every year, especially between April and September, the Public Security Department has appalling damage to report. To give an idea of its extent, here are four incidents of recent years:

1. January 14, 1936. Village of Mit Yaish, in the Markaz of Mit Ghamr. "The fire spread with terrifying speed, ending in the destruction of 94 houses. Hundreds of fellaheen are homeless."

2. April 22, 1936. El Muassaga, in the Markaz of Hehia. "The fire spread to 43 houses, which were reduced to ashes, with all the cattle, poultry and foodstuffs they contained. Losses were estimated at L.E. 300. The enquiry has proved that the fire was started by a woman of the village, named Nefissa Hassan, who was cooking in her home. A few sparks fell on the brushwood on the roof, and with the help of the wind the fire quickly spread."

3. May 5, 1937. "A terrible fire broke out in Bakanûsh, in Dessûq Markaz in the Mudiriya of Gharbiya. Five hundred houses were completely destroyed; 14 people were burnt alive, and 13 others who were rescued are suffering from severe burns."

4. January 14, 1941. "Fire broke out in the village of Deir, in the Markaz of Toukh, destroying 217 houses, causing 20 deaths, burning crops and cattle, and leaving 400 families destitute. The cause was a woman cooking on the roof."

656 There is indeed a regulation which forbids 'the storing of
731 brushwood on the flat roofs of houses', and a "Committee for Fighting Fires in the Countryside". But no regulation or committee can stop the fellah from storing his fuel on the roof, unless he is given the means of storing it elsewhere. He is similarly advised not to sleep with his cattle, but if he left them outside they would be stolen, and inside there is so little room.

353 What use does he make of the space available? If we go inside, we shall at once notice the darkness and the smell, if not the fleas. The house consists of a single room, sixteen to twenty feet by ten or twelve. "When

I go visiting my parishioners", says Mgr Khouzam, Bishop of Thebes, "I find few houses with doors. They have square holes for entrances, and these are the only openings. The sole furniture is an oven for bread, a jar of water, a cooking pot and a bowl. In a few houses there is a cord stretched across a corner from wall to wall. This is the wardrobe, where spare clothes are hung. The roof is so low as to be oppressive".

Fortunately, houses normally have two, if not three, rooms. (**) Apart from slight variations in plan, size and arrangement, these usually comprise:

1. A hall (*mandara*). Against the right-hand wall is built a long raised seat (*mastaba*). As the outside door opens into it, this is the best-lighted room in the house. It is used for visitors and guests.

2. Opening into this is the combined sleeping-room and kitchen. In a corner is the oven, built of bricks and set against the wall. Its flat top forms a kind of bed, on which two people sleep in winter. There is no chimney. The smoke escapes by the loophole in the wall.

3. Further in still is a little yard (*zarîba*) about six foot wide and partly covered with maize thatch. This serves as a stable for the *gamoossa* and the donkey, but can be approached only through the front door.

The distinction is not very rigid, and there is nothing to prevent the sitting-room from serving as a stable, or the yard as summer sleeping-quarters. The fowls live everywhere; the pigeons nest in niches in the outer wall, or in petrol tins piled together. In villages where there is a Coptic majority, the pigs must also be taken into account; the Christian fellaheen rear these, not for themselves, but for European pork-butchers. As often as not, we must add that friend of the fellah and guardian of his goods, his shaggy night-howling dog.

The floor of the house is of beaten earth. The furniture is heaped up in disorder in the corners. For meals there is a Primus stove, one or two copper cooking-pots, and a low round table of white wood about three feet wide and eighteen inches high. For sleeping there are straw mats, a few cotton coverlets, or perhaps only a big sack. Sometimes there are beds constructed of palm branches (in the same way as chicken coops) and perhaps a cotton-stuffed mattress. For household

and toilet use there is a large flat tub (*tisht*) which serves as both laundry-basin and bath, a fragment of mirror, and a big wooden chest which may hold almost anything. This was a gift at the betrothal, and its crude colours are reminders of a red-letter day. "In this chest near the oven, whose key the mistress of the house wears at her neck, I have seen all jumbled together eggs, pepper, cheese, rags, needles and thread, several necklaces and a packet of *kohl*." This from the letter of a surprised French missionary.

The close proximity of men, cattle and soil is as noticeable in the fellah's house as in the field and the village. It is a reflection of the fellah's social level and manner of life. Like house, like household.

The fellah's dependence on soil, sun and water extends even to his house. He himself is of the earth, earthy, through his labour and his food, in his diseases and finally in his death. His house no less, by the material of which it is made — floor, walls, roof and all — and by its very squatness is a part of the earth.

The fellah lives out of doors because of the lack of comfort in his home, which is no more than an unfurnished sleeping-place and a store-room, a part of the crowded camp which is the village.

All the houses are alike. The fellaheen have little individuality; each is an atomised unit of the mass, and his household but one cell in the agricultural hive. At the same time there is little or no space reserved for agricultural uses. The fellah works for others, and does not store the produce of the land for himself.

Yet this dwelling, which lacks so much that we deem essential, is so well adapted to its tenants and their habits that they will change or rather deform into its likeness any better-appointed house built for them on a model *'ezba*.

A house on an *'ezba* belongs to the owner, one in the village to the fellah. House and site together are worth at the most L.E. 25. There is no rent or house tax to pay. On an *'ezba* the dwelling enters into the conditions of lease or share-tenancy. In the village it belongs to the head of the family.

In this homestead scarcely larger than himself the fellah leads a life of his own, no longer as a serf but as a master. Each house contains a large family, including very often, besides the father and mother, four or five children, a grand-